

'The dream continues'

JTO Inc. celebrates 50 years in business

Betsy Scott

BSScott@News-Herald.com
Twitter: @ReporterBetsy

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Most 10-year-old boys spend their free time playing at any number of leisurely pursuits.

For Jerome Trask Osborne III, that's about the age that he began helping his dad, Jerry Jr., at work. "Ossie," as most people know him, recalls laying block at an industrial building on Hart Street in Mentor, where his dad's business got its start more than 50 years ago.

"He was a man of honor, vision," Ossie said. "He had vision like no one else that I've known."

"He was always like 20 years ahead of his time," added Maureen E. Osborne, Jerry Jr.'s widow and JTO Inc. chairman of the board.

That vision helped to create a multidiversified corporation out of a two-man firewood supply company. Osborne Brothers Tree Service was started in 1961 with his brother, Richard.

The two were business partners for 17 years and, in 1978, Jerry Jr. formed JTO Inc.

The company now employs 35 people and has done design, site work or been general contractor for about 200 building projects, including TriPoint Medical Center in Concord Township, Super Walmart in Madison and Residence Inn by Marriott in Mentor, to name a few.

"JTO has been the premiere office and industrial building developer in the city, whether it was the creation of the singular Heisley Racquet & Fitness Club or retail developments along Diamond Centre," Mentor Economic Development Director Ronald M. Traub said. "In addition to being a quality developer in the city, the late founder, Jerry Osborne, was also insightful in recognizing the opportunity of Diamond Centre and lands to the east."

In addition to construction, the company also deals in realty, surplus equipment sales and recycling of "green," or yard, waste.

The recycling division, started in 1996 under the name Mentor Recycled Landscape Materials, is in expansion mode.

"I probably invested \$2 million in equipment in the last five years," for green waste recycling, said Ossie,



Jeff Forman/JForman@News-Herald.com

Jerome T. Osborne III poses for a photo at the JTO recycling center as steam rises from composting yard waste as it is turned by an extended boom excavator.

JTO Inc. CEO and president. "Most everything generated in Lake County comes to our facility."

Clients include commercial yard waste haulers, the city of Mentor, the general public and hundreds of landscapers.

"My goal has been to have a one-stop shop for landscapers," Ossie said. "We started with the mulch and turned it into full-service landscape supply."

The latest move has been to begin recycling aggregate, or stone product.

"All the concrete and dirt from the Route 2 project is coming here," he said.

"There's no byproduct that's unusable."

JTO Inc.'s location at 6011 Heisley Road — across from the fitness club, opened by his father in 1971 — is on the site of the old city landfill. It is 25 acres mostly used for storing, recycling and composting huge piles of brush, wood and other debris.

"Nobody knows it's back

here," Ossie said. "It's a perfect use for a former landfill."

In the mid-1980s, Jerry Jr. purchased the land that is now the Diamond Centre commercial development off Heisley Road. He never lived to see his dream fulfilled for that property, suffering a fatal heart attack in 1992 at age 48.

However, Ossie continued to be involved in its development, including building Trask Towers and Trask Plaza, both bearing the family middle name.

Ossie acknowledges bearing the family's last name has its pros and cons. Most locals who have lived in Lake County for any length of time recognize the name Osborne, often associated with shrewd business tactics, and have an opinion about it.

"We battle with it all the time," Ossie said. "There are some tough eggs in the family, I guess you could say. ... My grandfather (Jerome T.

Osborne Sr.) is one of the finest businesspeople I know. ... He's going to be 90 in April and he still works."

Ossie attributes his success to that same work ethic.

"Get up every day and work," he said, when asked his secret.

The father of four says his son, Jerome T. IV, is following in his footsteps, having worked in the recycling division for three years now.

Along with aggregate recycling, Ossie's goals for JTO Inc. include opening satellite branches throughout Northeast Ohio that accept the same materials allowed at the Heisley Road site.

He is negotiating with a community 25 miles to the south, though he declined to specify where.

He never forgets the business's humble beginnings and continues to pay homage to his father in prominent places in the office and in company newsletters, reminding people, "the dream continues."